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PENCE SPEAKS IN SUPPORT OF TOLERANCE TOWARD ARAB AMERICANS

Washington, Mar 11, 2003 - WASHINGTON, DC – U.S. Congressman Mike Pence today made the following speech from the House floor regarding tolerance toward Arab Americans:

“Mr. Speaker, I was, as you were, here on September 11, 2001. I saw the skies filled with mud brown smoke rising from the devastation at the Pentagon. And I felt that anger that every American felt then, and that continues to simmer in the lesser angels of our nature to this very hour.

“There is in my heartland Indiana district, Mr. Speaker, a small mosque in Muncie, Indiana, where each weekend a small community of less than a thousand people of Arabic descent gather to practice their religious faith, each of them contributing in important ways in our community.

“They reached me in the immediate hours after September 11 and expressed to me their concern as family people for their well-being in the wake of this attack that was unanimously effected by Arab extremists against our country. It was then that I issued a statement I read again today.

“I said then, ‘The terrorists who attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon are not representative of the overwhelming majority of Arabs or Muslims in the United States and that we could not allow anger at this horrible act to lead us to hate or discriminate against innocent individuals who happen to be of Middle Eastern descent.’ I said, ‘Terror has no regard for religion or ethnicity. If we attack the innocent simply because of their ethnic status, we are no better than the terrorists who attacked us.’

“And so we come to these days in which we find ourselves again, Mr. Speaker, perhaps on the precipice of a war in the Middle East with the news in our Muncie newspaper this weekend that a recent graduate of Ball State University was arrested on terrorist charges in his home in Idaho. And I thought with this news with the potential for war abroad and terrorist attacks at home, it would be appropriate to rise again - to remind the people of my district, and the state, and even of this county that we cannot allow the hatred that terrorists and their sympathizers possess to inflame our hearts or distort our communities.

“I urge my fellow citizens to continue to embrace the ideals of the Declaration of Independence and understand that while we believe, and have built a nation on the notion that we were all endowed by our Creator with unalienable rights. Therefore, we cannot and must not give voice to persecution or permit acts of discrimination against those among us who may be of Middle Eastern descent. Millions of Arab Americans like those in my district contribute daily in vital ways to our communities in our nation in every professional class – medicine, academia, engineering, and yes, Mr. Speaker, to the United States Armed Forces.

“The good book tells us, ‘And what does the Lord require of you? To do justice, to love kindness, to walk humbly with your God.’ Let us, as we go into these difficult times and in the difficult days ahead rededicate ourselves to practice justice and kindness toward every American citizen and visitor of Middle Eastern descent that we might hold up those ideals that brave Americans fight to defend in these days.”

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